

FACT SHEET AVIAN INFLUENZA



INFORMATION

Avian Influenza

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza is a rapidly spreading viral disease that mainly infects birds. Migratory birds are natural carriers for the disease and seldom show signs of illness. Poultry are very susceptible to the virus.

Is avian influenza contagious? Who is susceptible? How is it transmitted?

Yes, avian influenza is contagious. It exists naturally in many wild and migratory birds. The disease is transmitted by direct contact with infected birds, aerosol, and contaminated objects, such as footwear, clothing, equipment and vehicles. Although extremely rare, humans and other mammals can be vulnerable to the disease.

What are the signs of avian influenza?

In birds, signs include respiratory disease (coughing, sneezing, respiratory distress), decreased egg production, swelling of the head, eyelids, comb and wattles (the flap of skin hanging from the neck of chickens and turkeys), unsteady coordination and sudden death. In humans, symptoms include typical flu-like signs (fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches), eye infection, pneumonia or respiratory distress.

How do I avoid avian influenza or stop it from spreading?

Avoid contact with sick or infected birds. Avoid live bird markets. Wash your hands before and after any contact with animals or meat products. When traveling abroad, do not bring any prohibited items back to the U.S. Wash and disinfect any items used while traveling abroad.

If you own birds and suspect your flock has the disease, quarantine the affected animals and area immediately, and restrict traffic on and off your farm. Notify your veterinarian of any suspected cases. No effective treatment for the disease has been found. Infected animals must be humanely destroyed and disposed of properly to prevent the disease from spreading.

Although vaccines are available, they are not commonly used because no vaccine covers all 15 strains of the disease. Prevention is the best way to combat avian influenza. Use strict biosecurity measures on your farm. Keep wild birds and infected birds away from your home or farm. Stay informed about the health of neighboring animals. New or returning animals to your home or farm should also be isolated for at least two weeks. Thoroughly disinfect any material entering and leaving the farm such as tires, equipment, and clothing.

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How is it treated?

At this time there is no known treatment.

Are there public health risks?

Though extremely rare, humans can contract avian influenza. Most human cases have occurred in people with close contact to infected birds or their environment. If you have had contact with infected birds or are showing symptoms, contact your health care provider immediately. There has been no reported case of avian influenza following consumption of fully-cooked meat.